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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 005698

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERTS  
COMMITTEE STALLED

REF: A. A. TEL AVIV 02506

[B](#). B. TEL AVIV 01024

[C](#). C. 04 JERUSALEM 4029

[D](#). D. AMMAN 5073

[E](#). E. TEL AVIV 02486

Classified By: Economic Counselor William Weinstein, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This message was cleared with Consulate General Jerusalem.

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: Officials from the MFA, Environment Ministry, and Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) plan to meet post-disengagement to discuss whether and how to go forward with the Environmental Experts Committee (EEC). Progress on restarting the EEC, suspended since the beginning of the recent Intifada, slowed after the GOI's last-minute decision not to attend a May 2 EEC meeting because of internal debate on the meeting's location. Furthermore, accusations of Israeli "environmental atrocities" at a July 30 press conference by Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority (EQA) head Yousef Abu Safiyya have led the MOE to consider pursuing other PA partners for the Committee. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) ESTH Officer and TDY Deptoff met August 9 with Ori Livne, MOE International Relations Director to discuss Israeli-Palestinian environmental cooperation. Livne expressed frustration with repeated attempts to work with Yousef Abu Safiyya, head of the Environment Quality Authority (EQA) on concrete environmental projects to improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. At a July 30 press conference at the International Press Center in Gaza City, Abu Safiyya accused Israel of committing environmental atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Abu Safiyya stated that Israel had deliberately destroyed roads, infrastructure, and arable lands and uprooted two million trees during the Intifada. (Note: In October 2004, ConGen reported that, as of 2003, 300,000 trees had been uprooted according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the Palestinian Authority (PA) Ministry of Agriculture (ref C). End Note). The disposal of toxic waste in the Palestinian territories was also cited as a concern. (Note: Embassy Amman reported in June 2005 on the Israeli and Jordanian dumping of sewage in the lower part of the Jordan River which flows to Palestinian communities in the West Bank (ref D). End Note). Abu Saffiya also accused Israel of the theft from Palestinian areas of high quality sand, which is used to make electronic and glass materials. (Comment: ConGen and Embassy Tel Aviv have asked for the State Legal Advisor's opinion on how international law handles quarry-type operations in occupied territories (ref E). End Comment). Abu Safiyya stated that the PA had requested help from UN agencies to stop Israeli violations of international law. Abu Safiyya did not respond to a letter from Livne after the press conference. Without elaborating, Livne said she is considering attempting to identify a new Palestinian partner for the EEC, perhaps the Ministry of Local Government.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) TDY Deptoff discussed the EEC August 23 with Yaacov Keidar, MFA Water Issues Director. Keidar said that Israel backed out of the planned May 2 EEC meeting because of internal debate over the location of the meeting. According to Keidar, the Palestinians insisted that the meeting be held at the UNDP office with UN Environmental Program (UNEP) observers. (Note: UNEP had earlier brought the parties together in Helsinki to restart the EEC. End note). Keidar said that Israeli officials initially agreed, but then decided not to attend because their position is that the EEC is bilateral and should not include others. (Note: Concerns about outside involvement and meeting locations have been raised primarily by the Israeli Ministry of Defense. End note). However, Keidar said, since May 2, the GOI tried several times to restart the EEC but ceased those attempts after Abu Safiyya's press conference.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) According to Keidar, Abu Safiyya contacted, both orally and in writing, UNEP Executive Director Klaus Topfler, to request an audit for hazardous materials left in evacuated settlements. Keidar said that Abu Safiyya wanted the EQA to be the first to go into these areas after the Israeli withdrawal, in order to conduct such an audit, and for the audit results to be put before the Hague (Note: We believe

his reference is to the International Court of Justice, as the PA has used this Court previously. End note). Topfler approached the GOI on the audit but was told that the GOI was not interested in an audit if there was an a prior intent to accuse Israel of environmental crimes, according to Keidar. Keidar said that Israel is not prepared to cooperate or meet with Abu Safiyya at this time.

15. (C/NF) Keidar also said that he and Livne share the same views on the EEC and Abu Safiyya. While Keidar did not answer directly when asked if Israeli officials had contacted the PA Ministry of Local Government, he did say that the EQA is a very small, very weak authority and that the MOLG is "much more practical." But, he added, the PA has appointed the EQA as its official representative to the EEC, and so the PA must be the one to change it.

16. (C/NF) On a positive note, Keidar reported that General Mishlev, head of the Civil Administration, had told him that PA Civil Affairs Minister Dahlan called Abu Safiyya to discuss convening the EEC, and, in a meeting between Mishlev and Dahlan, Dahlan said he would try to do something about the situation. Keidar believes Dahlan is capable, but, with Dahlan's priority on disengagement, Keidar was not inclined to push the EEC issue with him. Keidar stated that post-disengagement, the MFA, MOE and the Civil Administration will probably reconvene to discuss whether and how to go forward with the EEC.

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